

# Frequently Asked Questions for School Nurses



## What is the Tdap requirement for 6<sup>th</sup> graders?

The rule states that a booster dose of tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) vaccine is required for individuals attending public school who are entering the sixth grade on or after August 1, 2008, if five years or more have passed since the last dose of tetanus/diphtheria toxoid.

Individuals not attending public schools (i.e., private, home-school, non-traditional schools) who are 12 years of age on or after August 1, 2008, are also required to have a booster dose of tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis vaccine, if five or more years have passed since the last dose of tetanus/diphtheria toxoid.

## Why was the Tdap requirement added?

This immunization rule change was made to help reduce the incidence of whooping cough (pertussis) disease among North Carolina's children. In recent years, North Carolina, as well as the rest of the United States, has seen an increase in the number of whooping cough cases. Most children are fully protected against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis prior to entering kindergarten because of the DTaP vaccine. However, immunity to these diseases wanes after about 10 years. By giving adolescents a booster dose of Tdap, they will receive protection against these deadly diseases for the years to come and help to protect those individuals who are immunocompromised and infants who are not old enough to receive a full series of vaccine.

## What if a child has received a Td booster within the past five years?

If it has been less than five years since the child received a dose of tetanus-containing vaccine, according to the law, they do not need a booster dose of Tdap to enter the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Please be sure that the child provides a Certification of Immunization that documents the dose of tetanus-containing vaccine received and the date.

## What is the mumps requirement?

Individuals are now required to receive a second dose of mumps vaccine before enrolling in school for the first time on or after July 1, 2008. Children were previously required to have only one dose of mumps vaccine. Most children already receive two doses of the MMR vaccine (measles-mumps-rubella) by age four. Therefore, this law will primarily affect children who receive single antigen doses of the vaccines. Beginning with the 2008-09 school year, schools will need to verify that all children entering school for the first time have received two doses of measles, two doses of mumps, and one dose of rubella vaccine prior to entry. Any student entering school for the first time

prior to July 1, 2008 is not required to receive a second dose of mumps vaccine.

## What should I do with the materials included in this packet?

We encourage you to work with your principal, School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) and local health department to make sure parents are aware of the immunization requirements and also to make sure they are met in a timely manner. The materials included in the Parents and Media sections can be distributed and used to educate parents/guardians about the immunization rule change through a variety of channels. If you have any questions about the materials included in this packet, please contact the North Carolina Immunization Branch at **(919) 707-5550**.

## What if I want to set up a Tdap clinic at my school?

Your ability to set up a Tdap clinic at your school depends largely upon your relationship with and the capacity of your local health department. Please contact them about the possibility of setting up a clinic, but realize that there are no guarantees that they can help. Remember that the vaccine is required for all students prior to entering 6<sup>th</sup> grade, so the best time to conduct immunization clinics might be during the 5<sup>th</sup> grade year.

## How long does the child have to provide their Certificate of Immunization?

The school must notify the parent(s), guardian or person in *loco parentis* that they have 30 calendar days from the first day of attendance to present the required up-to-date immunization record for the child. If the child's immunizations are not up-to-date, the required immunizations must be obtained during the same 30 day period. After the 30 calendar days have passed, if the child is still not in compliance, the child will not be permitted to attend the school or facility until the required immunization has been obtained.

## What process/protocol should I follow to collect immunization records and notify parents of non-compliance?

Every school is different, so the following immunization process/protocol is just an example. Please use the process that is best for your school.

1. Typically the school nurse has oversight for this process.

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2. Homeroom teachers or first period teachers collect Certificate of Immunization.
3. Certificate of Immunization is assessed for compliance.
4. The students' records that are not in compliance are flagged and the information is shared with the school nurse and principal.
5. The school nurse and/or principal will initiate the parent notification process.
  - a. Notice of deficiency is sent (for a sample deficiency letter, please see the non-compliance letter in the School Section of this resource kit).
  - b. If a parent does not respond in the 30-daytime frame with the correct documentation then a letter of suspension is sent (for a sample suspension letter, please see the School Section of this resource kit).
  - c. Correct documentation can include proof of immunization, a doctor's letter of exemption, or an exemption for religious reasons.
6. The student is suspended until appropriate documentation is obtained.

### What about transfer students?

North Carolina schools are required, upon request, to send a copy of the child's immunization record at no charge to the student's new school. The former school shall forward a child's immunization record regardless of status of fees owed to the school.

### What immunization exemptions are available under North Carolina law?

There are only two types of exemptions from required immunization that are available in the state of North Carolina. The two types of exemptions are medical and religious. There is no exemption available for personal beliefs.

### What type of documentation does a parent need to submit to claim a religious exemption for their child?

To claim a religious exemption, the parent, guardian, or person *in loco parentis* requesting the exemption must write a statement of their religious objection to immunization, including the name and date of birth of the person for whom the religious exemption is being requested.

If a family is requesting a religious exemption for more than one child, a separate statement should be prepared for each child. This statement would then be provided to the school in place of an immunization record. Statements of religious objection to immunization do

not need to be notarized or prepared by an attorney. They also do not need to be submitted to the State for review or approval.

### What type of information does a physician need to submit to document a medical exemption for a child?

If a physician licensed to practice medicine in this State certifies that a required immunization is or may be detrimental to a person's health due to the presence of one of the contraindications adopted by the N.C. Commission for Public Health, the person is not required to receive the specified immunization as long as the contraindication persists.

Medical exemptions can be requested by a physician licensed to practice medicine in North Carolina. The physician must complete, sign and submit a Medical Exemption Statement (DHHS 3987) verifying true contraindications/precautions to vaccination, according to the recommendations of the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). A copy of this form is available at [www.immunize.nc.gov/schools/ncexemptions.htm](http://www.immunize.nc.gov/schools/ncexemptions.htm). This form can then be accepted by schools, child care programs and other agencies that require proof of immunization. This signed form does not require approval from the N.C. State Health Director. A second medical exemption form is also available for special circumstances when the Medical Exemption Statement does not cover the reason why the doctor wants to exempt the child or when there are circumstances not addressed by the ACIP recommendations. This form is called the Physician's Request for Exemption (DHHS 3995). It is also available at the website listed above. This form does require approval from the N.C. State Health Director.

### Will there be a charge for students to receive the required vaccines?

Children will be able to receive the vaccines at their doctor's office or local health department. If the child is insured, the insurance may cover the costs of the vaccine. If the child is 18 years of age or younger, and meets one of the following qualifications, he or she is eligible to receive the vaccine from the state at no cost:

- ▶ Is eligible for Medicaid,
- ▶ Has no health insurance,
- ▶ Is Native American or Alaskan Native, or
- ▶ Has health insurance, but it does not cover the cost of vaccine.

### Who can I contact for more information?

More information is available on the website, [www.immunize.nc.gov](http://www.immunize.nc.gov). For questions, please contact your regional school nurse consultant or the Immunization Branch at **(919) 707-5550**.

